

Stoke the engines

U.S. should seek a self-reliant Amtrak

Some members of Congress used to see Amtrak, the nation's passenger train, as a socialist experiment going nowhere fast.

Now, lawmakers are changing their minds as more and more people opt to ride the government-subsidized trains.

Congested airports, delayed and overbooked flights, and roads clogged with traffic are making Amtrak an attractive alternative for travelers. Americans increasingly are choosing right-of-way scenery over the friendly skies.

As a result of this rail service revival, lawmakers are pressing Amtrak executives to bring the trains to their districts and states.

"People have been discovering passenger rail service again," Rep. Al Swift, D-Wash, said.

Swift proposes using 1 cent of the 2.5 cent gasoline tax for Amtrak's capital fund. Surprisingly, Swift's proposal was received well in a preliminary hearing in Congress.



Scott Maurer/DN

Although Amtrak is gaining speed in the popularity race, the federal government may be applying the brakes.

President Bush included an operating subsidy for the rail service in his budget proposal, but he did not propose any money for Amtrak's capital projects.

Last week, Amtrak Chairman W. Graham Claytor Jr. outlined an \$18 billion capital improvement program that will span 15 years.

Without these capital projects, Amtrak's trains may come to a screeching halt.

Amtrak says it must replace its aging locomotives and cars that carry 22 million passengers a year over 24,000 miles of track. The rail service also is looking at new routes that would increase profit — along with political support — and is preparing to test new trains that would cut travel time by more than 25 percent.

Amtrak's federal subsidy now covers about 80 percent of its operating costs, but that number excludes the funds needed to modernize and replace its trains.

The federal government could save money in the long run by financing Amtrak's capital projects and allowing it to rebuild its fleet.

Then, by 2000, the rail service can reach its destination — operation without the push of money from the folks on Capitol Hill.

Endowment for arts vital

For a law student, I would have expected Mark Fahleson to have done more thorough research before attempting to present a case for the abolition of the NEA ("Federal funding for the arts lunacy," DN, Feb. 28). The actual amount of funding going to artists such as Mapplethorpe and Serrano is piddly and insignificant compared to the cash flow from the NEA that goes into valuable programs for art in our schools and programs to preserve folk arts. Here's your research, Mr. Fahleson. It's all there in the stacks at Love Library.

The NEA funds the following: design, including interior and architectural; dance programs (\$13,000 to Lincoln for the 90-91 season); education programs that include artists in schools; literature, including poetry, novels, essays and playwriting; museums, for training in areas such as preservation among others; music of all kinds, jazz, ethnic, opera, orchestra, soloists (Lincoln Symphony Or-

chestra 1990 \$6,000 — Young People's Concert Series, Nebraska Chamber Orchestra \$3,000, Omaha Symphony Association \$50,000); public media, including public television and video and film artists; theater, including playwrights (Sheldon's film theater 1990 \$10,000); and finally, visual arts (UNL — \$25,000 to artists' fees and administrative costs). The list goes on and on. Fahleson has no concept of what we as a country would stand to lose if the NEA were abolished. UNL's art staff alone includes many nationally known artists who may someday (if not now) need to turn to the NEA for funding. My suggestion is that he get the record straight before he gets carried away with sweeping generalizations, and that he apply for an NEA grant himself. Somewhere out there is a fiction writers' workshop with his name on it.

Sharon Elbract-Ohmberger
senior
art

LETTER POLICY

The Daily Nebraskan welcomes brief letters to the editor from all readers and interested others.

Anonymous submissions will not be considered for publication. Letters should include the author's

name, year in school, major and group affiliation, if any. Requests to withhold names will not be granted.

Submit material to the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, Neb. 68588-0448.



BRIAN ALLEN

Hunters preserve, not destroy

For the first time in recent memory, the Nebraska Legislature actually is considering a bill that makes sense and receives my total support.

LB919, sponsored by Sen. Jerry Chizek of Omaha and others, would make it a crime to intentionally harass hunters, fishers and trappers who lawfully are engaged in their respective pursuits.

Larry Morris of the Nebraska Game and Parks said Nebraska was one of only five states that did not protect the right of their law-abiding sportsmen/women to pursue their activities in peace.

Hunter harassment has not been a large problem in Nebraska, Morris said, but it is common on both coasts and appears to be moving toward the Midwest from both directions.

It is unfortunate that we need such a law in this state, but we do.

In other states, hunters have been followed by screaming mobs of protesters, access roads to hunting areas have been littered with tire spikes, dog food has been mixed with broken glass and rat poison and left in areas where hunting with dogs is common, and in one case, hunters actually were jabbed and hit with ski poles by anti-hunting demonstrators.

Someone who would put out poisoned dog food laced with glass cannot have much concern for animal rights.

Anti-hunting groups are out to save Bambi and Thumper from the evil, satanic hunters. Someone must tell these people about the difference between the World of Disney and the real world we live in.

In the real world, deer don't fall in love with each other, and rabbits don't hang with skunks named Flower. All the beautiful little animals wouldn't live in peace and happiness forever if only the wicked hunters were banished from the utopian woods.

In the real world, which I must describe to the anti-hunters because they never spend any time here, life is cruel.

Things here don't exist in the minds of the Disney Disciples: diseases such as blue tongue, rabies and distemper that spread like the black plague in overpopulated wildlife habitats, starvation caused by too many animals and not enough food and the ever-present danger from our nation's highways.

Population control of deer herds is necessary if we don't want the entire herd to starve. Anyone who ever has seen a serious browse line knows so. A browse line occurs when all the small branches and twigs hanging within the lower five to six feet of



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trees and bushes have been clipped by starving deer.

We either can control the population of deer on a yearly basis by hunting, or we can let the population grow to a point at which winter starvation will kill not only a few deer but the entire herd.

The same holds true for most other animal species. Hunters and trappers either can keep animal populations in check and derive some benefit in the process, or motor vehicles, disease and starvation will do it for us in a much more cruel and much less efficient manner.

Development and agriculture, not hunters, have driven away the traditional large predators such as wolves, mountain lions and bears. The role of population control in the remaining wildlife habitat now falls to humans.

If anti-hunters ever succeed in obtaining their stated goal of the illegalization of all hunting, game and non-game species will not benefit. They will instead be the biggest losers.

While some anti-hunting groups have made a few commendable contributions to wildlife management and habitat protection, the vast majority of these projects are financed by hunters.

Larry Witt, also of Nebraska Game and Parks, said all money derived from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and permits in Nebraska was used to finance wildlife management, the development and maintenance of state wildlife areas, fish hatcheries and wildlife law enforcement (game wardens).

Proceeds from the sale of habitat stamps, which are required to validate every Nebraska hunting license, go toward the acquisition and devel-

opment of wildlife habitat areas. Proceeds from waterfowl stamps or "duck stamps," required by the federal government for the hunting of migratory waterfowl, go to federal wildlife and wetland conservation programs.

With the exception of the Schramm State Aquarium and a small percentage of the law enforcement budget, no tax dollars go into wildlife management or habitat acquisition. It all comes from hunters, fishers and trappers.

While this money is targeted for game species, such as deer, ducks, pheasants and rabbits, any habitat acquired or improved for their use will benefit thousands of non-game species as well.

And licenses are not the only way sportsmen contribute to the benefit of wildlife.

At the federal level, the Pittman-Robertson Act imposes an 11-percent user excise tax on all sporting arms and ammunition and a 10-percent tax on all pistols, revolvers and archery equipment. This money goes to finance federal habitat purchase and wildlife management programs as well as safety programs, such as hunters' safety courses.

Pittman-Robertson funds are not marked specifically for game species, but are used to benefit all wildlife species.

Similarly, the Dingell-Johnson Act imposes a 10-percent tax on all fishing equipment, a 3-percent tax on all trolling motors and depth finders, and import duties on boats and yachts. These funds are used for game-fish management and Aquatic Education programs.

Additionally, private hunting organizations, such as Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, raise millions of dollars annually for habitat and wetland preservation.

Regardless of whether they agree with hunting, anti-hunters must realize that hunters provide for the control and management of what wildlife habitat we still have, and more importantly, the funds for the preservation and acquisition of additional wildlife habitat.

Anti-hunters believe that hunters, fishers and trappers are the bane of all animals, when, in fact, they are the largest force standing up for wildlife against roller-coaster population explosions, mass starvation and the continued development and destruction of habitat.

Don't go hunting or fishing if you don't want to, but if you really want to help wildlife, buy a hunting license.

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